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World Chronicle

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HUMAN RESOURCES

DENIS HALLIDAY, Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of Human Resources Management, elaborates on efforts to modernize and re-energize human resources management in the United Nations Secretariat. Manager development and training is essential to develop an improved United Nations management culture, which would operate with enhanced communication, support, transparency, participation and cooperation. The new Performance Appraisal System (PAS) is designed not only to identify staff strengths and weaknesses, but also to enhance trust between managers and staff members. A buy-out offer is intended to encourage the early retirement of some senior staff, which would open the way for career advancement among younger staff, especially women. Mr. Halliday believes that a minimum of three to five years is needed to implement changes and see results.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Over the last 50 years, the United Nations system has grown to include a large number of international bodies and agencies as well as tens of thousands of staff members serving in many parts of the world. Today, the world organization is under pressure to reshape its priorities and adapt to the new realities of more demands and responsibilities without additional financial or human resources. To effectively carry out the increasing mandates, efforts are under way to streamline and reinvigorate one of the principal organs of the United Nations -- the UN Secretariat.

Our guest today is in a unique position to reflect on efforts to better utilize the human resources of the Secretariat. He is Denis Halliday, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management. Joining me to talk with Mr. Halliday are Ian Williams of *The New York Observer* and Bhaskar Menon of *The Times of India*.

Mr. Halliday, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

HALLIDAY: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, it's been reported that the former Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, when asked how many people worked for the United Nations, replied "About half." Seriously, give us a few numbers, if you will: roughly how many people work for the Organization world-wide, the agencies, et cetera, the system; how many in New York; roughly what is the breakdown, men-women; and which nationality has the largest number of staff.

HALLIDAY: Yes. World-wide, in terms of the UN system, we estimate approximately 35,000 staff members. That's of all categories. Here in the Secretariat, and I mean the global Secretariat of the UN, we count approximately 15,000. That excludes short-term people, consultants and such, and 200 Series, project personnel. And here in New York we have some 7,000 or 8,000 staff. The gender balance in terms of our professional colleagues is some 33 per cent women. Those are the current figures.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you have any idea how this compares with other major international organizations -- the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Community, et cetera?

HALLIDAY: Well, in spite of the criticism we have from many external to the Secretariat, including some of our Member States, I think our balance of 33.2 per cent is not quite as bad as one is led to believe. However, it's not good enough, and that's quite

clear. And the Secretary-General is committed, we're all committed, to changing this, hopefully by the year 2000.

MENON: Could you address the substance of what Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar said? Do you think that comment is unfair?

HALLIDAY: Well, I was asked that question specifically in relation to Geneva some months ago, and I said, yes, the perception seems to be that in Geneva, for example, there is not a full day put in by some staff members. But you know, this is something that's very difficult to comment on. I can't accept that. I know we have staff --

MENON: But what proportion is "some"?

HALLIDAY: Well, you know, I know we have staff who work extremely hard. I'm not down there at the gate counting people coming in at ten o'clock or eleven o'clock. It's a perceptional problem.

LITTLEJOHNS: But surely it's up to their managers to make sure that they do a solid job, isn't it?

HALLIDAY: Yes, absolutely. The managers are held accountable by the Secretary-General to make sure our staff are doing their utmost. And that's the reason we're introducing this new performance management system.

LITTLEJOHNS: But the UN has no greater percentage of slackers than most employers?

HALLIDAY: Well, I like to think that the private sector is more carefully managed in terms of human resources, and we in the public sector need to get our act together and do a better job.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned the role of the managers here. One of the perceptions which demoralizes some staff is that their managers are among the people who will be crawling in late, disappearing early, and passing the buck. And one of the problems, for example, of your suggested performance appraisal is that the managers play a key role, and many staff here are very, very frustrated with their managers, who they see as political employees of limited competence, intellect or compassion. And these are the people who will be assessing the staff under them, and you're going to have some very severe contradictions there.

HALLIDAY: Well, one of the things that hit me first when I came here was this lack of trust between staff and management, and perhaps management and staff. And that is very noticeable, and it's frankly undermining many of the things that I would like to do here. And the performance appraisal system is a very good example of that. Staff clearly do not trust their managers to do a fair appraisal that's objective. The systems we're trying to set up are designed to take care of that concern and set up a dialogue on some

collaborative togetherness in terms of working at work programmes and having people appraised against their work programme, not against some other personality trait or physical attribute.

MENON: I've been around a long time. I've covered the UN and I've been writing about the UN for about a quarter of a century, and one of the things that's struck me down the years is to what extent cultured, sophisticated people tend to be racist. And this was brought home to me rather vividly a while ago by this African who is a very competent person, whom I've known for some while, who just moved into a new job, and his supervisor said to him -- sat him down, very cordially, and said "You know I don't want you in my office." And the only reason for this that the African could think of was racism. To what extent has this come to your attention as a problem?

HALLIDAY: I must say, racism is not something that I've come up against. We do have a body to deal with discrimination -- very important, I would say. Secondly, we're working now on a better means to respond to harassment, and that can include, of course, obviously, racial discrimination and also sexual harassment and areas of that sort. And we're planning to put together a more sophisticated system so people can come forward in an environment where they're not threatened by reprisal or any other aspect of speaking out.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the other hand, Mr. Halliday, the head of the World Health Organization, Dr. Nakajima, ran into a lot of flack some time ago because he made some rather disparaging remarks about African staffers, why there were not more African staffers in more responsible positions, and he made some remarks which gave the impression that he didn't think they were up to the job. So, I mean, if you get that kind of comment from the head of an agency, surely the problem of racial attitudes must go down the line here in the Secretariat?

HALLIDAY: Well, if that's true, I think it's a very unfortunate statement. Here in the UN we have African colleagues at the very top of the Organization, doing an extraordinarily successful job.

WILLIAMS: But here in your documents for last year, you talk about the role of the Member States and you talk about how important they are as a recruitment component, and yet long-term viewers of the UN have suggested that one of its biggest failures over the years has been its failure to live up to its own Charter, denying a role to Member States in appointments. And there's a feeling that appointment after appointment is politically motivated, that they're made at the very highest level. Heads of agencies like UNICEF and UNDP seem to be presidential political appointees from the US. You have ambassadors banging on the doors almost continuously getting people in. And let's say the Member

States don't always send of their best; they send of their best-related, or they send of their deadwood who need pensioning off, and --

LITTLEJOHNS: Present company excepted.

[LAUGHTER]

WILLIAMS: And, in general, this is one of the reasons why these people, of course, don't begin at entry level positions, they're parachuted into precisely the management positions we're talking about, which leads to the crisis of morale of people who are recruited for their ability and idealism suddenly being confronted with politically-placed people at management levels.

HALLIDAY: Well, in this strategy we have not excluded Member States, because that is obviously impossible. What we've done is we've tried to indicate that we'd like our Member States to give us their best. You know, we're not talking about brain drain exactly here, we're talking about a handful of people coming in each year on a systematic basis. We need the best and we deserve the best. And that's the obligation of Member States, as far as I'm concerned. The fact that there have been political appointments in the past, I constantly hear this, and it undermines, as you yourself said, the confidence of staff in management. Now, at the very top levels of this Organization, political appointment is the name of the game -- you're talking ASG and above. That is the way it's been established. But below that, you know, I think increasingly we're looking at competence and we're getting competence over and above political interference. I can talk from experience of the D2, D1 and down level.

WILLIAMS: What do you do about the previous deadwood that you're talking about? If you accept the point that this deadwood was imported at some point.

HALLIDAY: I don't accept the term of "deadwood", but I --

WILLIAMS: Well, previous political appointees, then.

HALLIDAY: You know, part of this strategy is in fact that we've asked the Member States to give us $45 million so that, over a three-year period, we can buy out colleagues who have somehow reached the pinnacle or the ceiling of their capacity and need to separate from this organization, to allow us to have renewal, move people up from within, and bring in women -- which is one of the ways in which we'll address this gender imbalance.

MENON: You're quite right, political appointments are part of the game of the UN. It's a political organization, it can't avoid them.

HALLIDAY: Right.

MENON: But why do you do so little to make sure that the political appointees come into a culture, a strong organizational structure? Racism is one problem that I've

mentioned. You do nothing about it. There is no sensitivity training. Absolutely nothing is done to make people from all over the world who are brought together to work --

LITTLEJOHNS: But Mr. Halliday says he doesn't consider this a problem, racism.

MENON: Well, no, that's what I mean. It is a problem, because when you have people from around the world coming in and you expect them to work as a team, obviously there are going to be problems.

HALLIDAY: Well, do you know, we put all of our colleagues, USG and above, through an orientation programme which includes all aspects of living in this multi-cultural organization and raises issues of sensitivity, and need for sensitivity, in terms of cultural mix, language skills -- interacting with people of the extraordinary range that we have. So there is a programme to do that. Starting this year, we are going to introduce for the first time here a programme for D1s and D2s in '95 and so on down the management line --

LITTLEJOHNS: I think you ought to explain the terms D1 and D2. These are senior officers.

HALLIDAY: Yes. D1s and D2s are the senior-most managerial non-political appointments we have.

MENON: Directors.

HALLIDAY: Directors, right. And the plan is to teach them, to train them in the skills of managing people. It's something that we've neglected in this Organization, so it should be no surprise to us that we have difficulties in having this element of trust, because we have not trained our managers how to lead teams, how to give direction, establish goals, give feedback, stroke people in the way that we all require to perform adequately. It's a tremendous missing piece, I would say, in the mosaic of our structure here. And we're going to start that in '95. I think it will make a difference.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about gender bias? The treatment of women in the UN. There was a rather famous case of a rather senior member of the Secretariat from Argentina who resigned after a judge, in fact an Irish judge, ruled that charges that were made against him of sexual harassment were justified. How common is that kind of thing?

HALLIDAY: Oh, I believe that we have an environment here which does not sufficiently discourage harassment, including sexual harassment. That's why right now we have a task force -- I'm chairing it myself. We're bringing in members of the community here in New York; we've had several attorneys, including some of the attorneys who participated in this famous case to which you refer. And we're going to put out a sophisticated questionnaire to try to establish what in fact are the issues relating to sexual harassment -- what form does it take? where is it happening? -- and then work out how

we're going to stop it. Because it's obviously totally unacceptable behaviour, and we need to deal with it frontally, I would say.

WILLIAMS: One of the points about sexual harassment, and racial harassment, is that at the root of it is a profound sense of hierarchy, that the people who do the sexual harassing and racial harassing do so confident that there will be no repercussions, because here in the UN you're outside of any other legal system. If some of the behaviour I've seen in this building had happened on the other side of First Avenue, then there would have been multimillion dollar lawsuits ensuing immediately, and reinstatement -- there would have been court cases. Whereas over here they're stuck with a 50-year-old system in which if somebody makes a complaint, as in the case of sexual harassment, it can meander for 10 years through the system. On the other hand, people have been suspended, it's taken two years for their cases to be heard and, as happened last year, when their cases were heard and they were found totally innocent, they were then punished for something else that they weren't charged with to begin with -- in the case of the air transport procurement suspensions. So, all of this contributes to a profound lack of morale among staff: They say, well, we go through the system, we're found innocent, and then we're hit over the head; if we appeal against what our management do, we're still hit over the head. So isn't it time to really revamp the whole UN discipline system, legal system, and bring in an outside ombudsman to give it some objectivity?

HALLIDAY: Absolutely. And you'll find in the strategy that we are putting forward significant plans to change the so-called "justice system", including the introduction of an ombudsman system world-wide, in each secretariat, with a central ombudsperson here in New York, encouraging resolution of problems at a lower level, proposing the abolition of the Joint Appeals Board and bringing in an arbitration board -- a more modern approach to resolving differences -- with full time professional externals with arbitration experience to resolve these things quickly and fairly. And hopefully, with experience, we'll introduce binding arbitration, which I think staff will find quick and fair.

WILLIAMS: Binding arbitration, yes.

HALLIDAY: And likewise with disciplinary measures, we'd like to make it professional, full time, and hopefully get better results. Because we're all unhappy with the present system, staff and management together.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Denis Halliday, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management at the United Nations.

MENON: We spent the first half of the show looking at essentially the mud in the house. Perhaps we could raise our sights a little in the second half of the programme.

You need to look at the UN in the next 50 years. What's being done to encourage any kind of vision?

HALLIDAY: Well, you'll see in the area of human resources I've asked for, and the GA has given me, some new planning capacity. Because we need to look ahead now to determine what the Organization's going to need in the year 2005, 2010, 2020. We need to have aptitudes and skills coming on board now that are flexible enough to be of use to the Secretariat in the long haul. So we're beginning to look ahead and see what we will require. But it's extremely difficult with our situation of changing mandates to try to satisfy Member States, to anticipate all needs. I would like to see us move into a broader, more generalist type of managerial person for a start. And right now we're rather broken down into rather narrow occupational areas.

MENON: But, you know, one of the things that has struck me repeatedly about the UN is how little the senior management are aware of the importance of information. I know that you've just started a programme to let people have access to Internet. In every other organization every person has access to Internet. Here you're talking about letting five people in every department have access to Internet. Why --

LITTLEJOHNS: But isn't that because of financial constraints?

HALLIDAY: I don't believe so. I think you're right. We have been very slow in the Secretariat --

MENON: No, it's entirely psychological. They're afraid of a free flow of information. And this, I think, cuts to the root.

WILLIAMS: Managers sit on their files because their files are their power. Information is power in a bureaucracy.

HALLIDAY: I'd like to see open E-mail links throughout the Secretariat, which we also don't readily have today. But it's coming, it's coming.

LITTLEJOHNS: But you have some.

WILLIAMS: Across the road, again, at UNDP, as I understand, they have individual E-mail links to every single office in UNDP world-wide. And here in the Secretariat, people can't talk from one office to the other without sending a memo or going in person.

HALLIDAY: Well, that's my point there, because we do have E-mail in the Secretariat, but the global network is not quite up and running.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ian Williams used the "M" word: morale. Tell us about morale. Is it good, bad? How is it?

HALLIDAY: Well, you know, it's very hard to have good morale in a situation where we're constantly tightening the belt -- down-sizing, attrition. The budget, as you

know, is showing further reductions and savings. So that does clearly raise concern. And this issue of trust, this issue of not knowing exactly what one is employed to do, because goal-setting and work-planning are not customary, is not helpful in terms of making people confident, having them know exactly what they're going to do and against what they're going to be judged as good or less than good staff members. So I understand the morale problem; it's a real thing.

LITTLEJOHNS: You told us about this buy-out programme for which the General Assembly has allocated $45 million over three years. How successful is this proving to be? Are people being forced out, or is it entirely voluntary? And do the members of the staff who are liable to be affected or have an opportunity to be bought out perceive themselves to be under threat? How is it going?

HALLIDAY: Well, I very much hope not. This is a programme which is mutually acceptable to the Organization and the staff member. And that's the way it's worded. The plan is coming out very shortly, and I know there are many staff world-wide who anticipate taking advantage of this early retirement programme. We're doing it very modestly in terms of resources. There's no big fancy golden handshake of the sort that we may link to other large organizations; it's a fairly modest programme. But I think it will encourage people to leave the Organization a little early and free up opportunities for new people to move up, for younger people with more flexibility to respond to changing mandates to move up.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is it perhaps too modest to be an adequate incentive?

HALLIDAY: I very much hope not, but I'll be able to tell you that with a little experience behind me. Right now we have not actually received requests. But I expect to have, in the next six months or so, I would say several hundred -- 200, 300, 400, 500 requests, and we will take those that the programme managers determine are people they can afford to let go. They will have the choice, they will make the priorities.

LITTLEJOHNS: Does the programme go into effect in '96, or is it already in effect in '95?

HALLIDAY: No, it starts right now, the next couple of weeks.

LITTLEJOHNS: I see.

WILLIAMS: But these types of programmes sometimes lead to the conundrum that those who are actually active and versatile people, who can see a future for themselves outside, take the money and run, whereas the others, the deadwood, you might say, are left clinging to their one lifeline.

HALLIDAY: That is the great danger. And we have a very specific sentence in our issuance which says that the Secretary-General reserves the right to reject requests for this

separation programme, and that is designed to protect us from losing the best staff members. That's a very important point. I mean, the World Bank and others have made these errors in the past, and then had to re-hire. And we certainly don't want to do that.

MENON: One of the reasons for the low level of capacity or skills in the UN is that during the cold war many governments did not send their best people here, quite deliberately, because they didn't want a strong UN. Has that changed, do you think, in the post-cold war period?

HALLIDAY: Well, you know, if you look at the examination system -- which, I must say, I am still a newcomer to -- at the P2-P3 level, I think we're bringing in --

LITTLEJOHNS: That's the lowest professional level.

HALLIDAY: Yes, entry level professionals. I think we're bringing in some extremely bright, intelligent people, highly motivated. So I'm full of hope that we can get our Member States to give us the best. As I said before, we don't need dozens or hundreds, we need very few. And we deserve to have the best. And it's in their interest to give us the best. So I think that situation of the past is the past.

WILLIAMS: But don't you have a problem.... You bring in a bright, intellectual, idealistic person at the bottom level, you know, say 25, 30, and they're suddenly confronted with tired, stale bureaucrats who are political appointees, and they have to survive for 10 years before they can get the type of position which they need.

HALLIDAY: Oh, that is a very real problem. And at this entry level you find turnover, because people will not tolerate poor managers. And that's clearly one of our problems here. So if we don't excite young people, young people have other options, and they will leave us. So that's why this buy-out programme becomes part of a whole strategy. We've got to get people up and out and bring up the young ones, who are not patient people.

MENON: I was being told about an under-secretary-general, one of the senior under-secretaries-general -- one of the best, by the way -- who was briefing his staff about your new performance evaluation system, and at the end of it, there were a few people who were there to monitor how the meeting went. And they got together afterwards, and they found out that there was general disbelief, that no one believed a word this man was saying. They just didn't believe that anything was going to change.

HALLIDAY: Well, that's the trust problem which clearly exists in this Organization today. And it will only be overcome, I think, by experience and by showing that this system can work, and it serves staff and it serves the management.

WILLIAMS: Does that trust problem have repercussions? For example, peace-keeping, which is a sort of a fire station-type operation where you suddenly need a rush of

people but the rest of the time you don't, is usually kept at a bare minimum and sort of boosted with different trenches of staff, whereas you might get another department that's sort of over-staffed because it's always been over-staffed. How easy is it to transfer people from one department to another to meet the exigencies of demand?

HALLIDAY: Well, apart from peace-keeping, which attracts perhaps some of our most interesting staff, who are willing to take a risk and do something extraordinary, otherwise moving staff within departments is extremely difficult, because, you know, we're stuck with posts -- that's a budget issue -- and not many managers want to give up posts. So, one of my problems here, it seems to me, is that mobility within departments and between headquarters and our overseas duty stations is almost non-existent. That has got to be changed. It needs to be part of our career management system, which I hope we'll see in the next months and years.

MENON: What time frame are you looking at, and when do you see an improved morale and a more capable Secretariat?

HALLIDAY: When I was offered this job, my response was that this needs three to five years before you'll see any difference. Because when you're dealing with people, people-management issues, things don't happen quickly. One of the reasons I'm getting a rather negative reaction to the performance appraisal system, I think, is that we're being seen to be moving too quickly. And we're doing that because there's a lot of pressure from the General Assembly. They've made it very clear, they want to see a performance, an output from this Organization, and performance management of individuals is obviously a basic part of that. But the pressure to move quickly does have its costs, and we're seeing some ripples of concern now from staff members as a result.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Halliday, what are you doing about the problem of certain members of certain nationalities in the Secretariat receiving subsidies from their governments? Which is a violation of the rules. In 1992 the Secretary-General issued an instruction that this practice must cease, but to the best of my knowledge it's still continuing. What's happening about that?

HALLIDAY: Well, the position of the Secretary-General has not changed. He's declared very clearly that this is an unacceptable procedure, and I think he has put the challenge to the Member States to stop this practice. And that's where the burden lies: Member States are obliged to stop this practice. And that's where it stands, as far as I know.

WILLIAMS: Doesn't this raise the question of just how much you're paying the staff? By American standards, Federal Government standards, you're over-paying them,

but by the standards of every other civil service, if you want people to come from the Nordic countries, or Germany, or even Canada --

LITTLEJOHNS: Or Japan.

WILLIAMS: -- or Japan, then people are going to have to move to a strange city and take a huge drop in salary to work at the United Nations. So why should the subsidy be such a big problem?

HALLIDAY: Well, you see, the fact that the subsidy is being paid, I understand, by some Member States is a clear indicator that there is a problem, that there's a shortfall between our salary structure and the outside world. And you hit this very clearly today when you talk to Japan, parts of southeast Asia, and most of Europe. We simply do not attract the best people, because they prefer to go to Brussels, perhaps, or Paris, firstly and secondly, than to come to New York, and, as you say, take a significant cut, which makes it extremely unattractive.

LITTLEJOHNS: But you just said at the entry level you're getting very good people.

HALLIDAY: Yes, well, you know, people are motivated by the thought of joining the United Nations. That's still for many people, happily, a very exciting possibility. So that is still there. Not everybody works for money, it's quite clear.

LITTLEJOHNS: But salaries in the UN Secretariat are roughly similar to those in the United States, are they?

HALLIDAY: Well, we are now lagging behind the Federal service in Washington, currently --

MENON: Not if you listen to the Americans.

HALLIDAY: Well, I think they perhaps haven't looked at their figures recently. We're certainly way behind the World Bank and way behind the OECD.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Halliday, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Denis Halliday, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of the *New York Observer* and Bhaskar Menon of *The Times of India*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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